

**The
Garden of Pleasure**

THE GARDEN OF PLEASURE

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AUTHORS' PRESS
SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

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MAY 11 '22

no 1

THE GARDEN OF PLEASURE

THE modest Allen home on Lake street was small enough, goodness knows, and counting its five tiny rooms, would just about shelter a family of three in decent comfort. The five included, of course, the bathroom and the kitchen. But just now the empty house seemed to the lonely Edgar Allen incredibly large and vacant. The rooms echoed when he absent-mindedly called aloud to Jennie, forgetful for the moment that she wasn't there. How barren and empty the whole place seemed! And he wandered about rather aimlessly, before he began getting his supper.

His thoughts drifted to Danbury as he pried open the can of soup that was to be the principal article in his lonely meal, and he pictured the comfortable home where his wife and his little one were visiting for a few days while he batched it alone in their absence. He envied Cousin Alice the privilege of being with Jennie and Baby Mary even for a day or two.

He got out some crackers, a bit of left-over cottage cheese, part of an apple pie; and he warmed up the tea. He ate in the kitchen because it made less work; besides, the dining room, ordinarily cozy to the point of embarrassment, seemed so barren now. He avoided passing through it, when he could.

Supper over, he swept the dishes into a pile,

placed them in the dishpan and flooded them with water, intending to do them up later.

Edgar had intended going for a brisk walk this delicious Spring morning, to brace himself up after the depression of the past few days. His latest encounter with the whisky bottle had left him somewhat unstrung. And he knew perfectly well that that was why his wife had gone away for a visit—to seek a little heartease among intimate friends in the nearby town.

The distance between home and the downtown office building where he had employment as night janitor was not sufficient to give him the exercise he needed, so this morning he would seek the fresh air and variety of surroundings by taking a short hike out into the open country. His work commenced at night at seven o'clock, and ended in the morning at six.

But at the last minute before starting out, his sense of loneliness got the better of him, and he went straight to bed, after gulping his scant breakfast, which he had gotten into the habit of calling his “supper,” coming as it did at the end of his day. Jennie called it that, too—she had come to so completely submerge her life in his.

He got into bed without remaking it. The bedclothes were in a muss, but man-like he

crawled in, not caring. The drawn shades were a failure in keeping out the bewildering sunlight that somehow managed to bulge in everywhere. Finally he got up and stuck pins in around the edges, nailing down the shades to the casings. How he did miss Jennie! He listened for her movement out in the kitchen. And only now did he realize that it was the lullaby of little Mary's baby prattle that had been putting him to sleep each morning in the past.

All within half an hour two canvassers called at the side door, and the man came to read the gas meter. These visitors Edgar received in his pajamas. If Jennie had been there these intrusions would have been disposed of noiselessly. And sleep lingered while the remorseful husband thought of the worth of his absent wife in terms of unusual magnitude. Then he turned his face to the wall with a ferocious determination to drop quietly to sleep.

Which instantly brought on a train of most irrelevant ideas. These paraded through his tortured brain in motley array, and ended up with the dancing image of a whisky bottle. This sprightly bottle turned a neat somersault, and landed complacently in Edgar's pants pocket in the chair near the bed, which roused the sleeper from his unhealthy doze, and left

him sitting bolt upright in bed, glaring around the room. He looked at his trousers on the back of the chair—then remembered: he had brought home a pint bottle of the stuff from the offices in the Caswell building.

It took a moment or two for his dazed memory to recall just the circumstances of where he had gotten this bottle of brandy and why. Then he remembered: he had purloined it from a private locker, the key to which he had found and made a duplicate of. This locker was a wall safe in the office of one of the tenants of the Caswell building where Edgar worked—a man by name of Ordway. Edgar had made systematic pilgrimages to this mecca of wet goods, with results that were at first gratifying, but more lately astounding.

On the last occasion of his encounter with one of the Ordway bottles from the private locker, there had appeared to the befuddled senses of the drinker certain grotesque forms—gnomes and gargoyles of hideous mein, who had risen from the vapors that curled about the neck of the bottle. One of these was a huge Ape, who proceeded to make a fool of the unwilling Edgar by compelling him to perform all manner of ridiculous antics, while the other infernal genii laughed and chortled in their diabolical glee.

That was a lesson to Edgar Allen, and he swore off immediately and never touched another drop thereafter—not for several days! Then, curiosity got the better of him, and he had today brought a bottle of liquor home with him—for purely experimental purposes. The fiends had appeared to him only when he drank in Ordway's office. That was significant. Therefore, he would hereafter drink at home, apart from the creatures' natural habitat.

The revulsion of shame and disgust in Edgar over his drunken antics at command of the Ape had kept him sober these several days, and he had remained away from Ordway's specimen cupboard during all that time, until this morning—when he had conceived the really clever idea of testing the phenomenon of the fiends in a different locale. It is not improbable, either, that the knowledge of the intended absence of his wife and child influenced him.

When one wakes up from a debauch too weak and sick for further pleasure, it is not difficult, nor indeed unnatural, for him to see, just then, the consequences of his folly. So the vow is made anew, or a new vow is made in the old way, never again to touch a drop! But unfortunately for the victims, the drunkard's wheel is not easily stopped when once

set in motion; and he who has been carried upward to a point of sobriety will, by the continued turn of the wheel, with its inevitable momentum, be dragged downward into another period of intoxication. For to pass from nausea to revived appetite is simply a matter of time.

Edgar had gone to bed forgetful of his proposed experiment. But there were the pants, and bulging in the hip pocket the bottle of choice brandy that should prove or disprove the theory of liquor's habitableness by gnomes, gargoyles and creatures whose rightful habitat lay in other elements and spheres. Indeed, now that he was in his right senses, sitting there in bed in broad daylight, in a somewhat darkened room to be sure, he was not certain but that those experiences just passed through were of the essence of dreams, fabrications of a distorted mind. Fine brandy like this stuff he had with him might produce a beneficial instead of a baneful effect.

So he deliberately got up and secured the bottle. He took a few unusual precautions before getting back into bed, such as securely locking both bedroom doors, the one leading out into the kitchen and the one that connected with the bathroom. He even made sure that the windows were fastened, leaving not a breath of fresh air in the room—all the indications

of an oncoming old-time spree. But other emotions—rather, anticipations—dominated the expectant Edgar. He had wooed sleep with every known artifice, sane and otherwise, and had failed. Get his sleep he must, else how could he continue to work and support Jennie and little Mary. This argument had pathos, and was clinching.

Half a bottle of fine brandy will induce sleep in the worst insomniac that ever lived, and in a few minutes Edgar Allen was drifting down an enchanting river in a beautiful barge that rapidly approached a bewitching shore on which stood—the fairest damsel he had ever seen in all his life—

At which juncture he woke up, though he still seemed to be in a dream, but transplanted to another time and another place. But when he checked up on his situation, there he was, lying on his back in bed, viewing the familiar ceiling. Lowering his eyes, he could see the tops of the two windows with the shades pulled down. Yes—he was in bed in his own home, yet he had the peculiar and extremely pronounced sensation of being afloat in a strange element, buoyant and airy.

Now he was all at once conscious of the presence of someone in the room. He knew this—he was sure of it, but he dared not, at

first, turn his head to see, just because of that very certainty of someone near. Then it drew nearer—as he could feel—and it gradually bent over him, until he was looking into the face of a most beautiful woman—the enchantress of the isle in the stream. Her face was very close to his now—too close! He could feel her warm breath and sensed her quick pulse. He sprang to a sitting posture, and the woman drew back a few paces.

“Who in Heaven’s name are you?” the astonished Edgar challenged. If one could be alarmed and beguiled in a composite emotion, then that was Edgar’s situation precisely.

It seemed as if a magic hand suddenly raised the curtains and let all the sunshine stream in gloriously when the apparition made answer.

“Men call me Siren,” she replied. “In ancient times my sisters sang so sweetly on dangerous shores that hardy mariners were lured to their death upon treacherous rocks.”

“But you—where do YOU come from, and who are YOU?” Edgar put his query eagerly, as if he had another ready to follow it.

“I? Why, I dwell in alcohol, and am the strange woman seen in drunkard’s wine. Many fall into my power when under the influence of drink who could not otherwise be led astray. That, I suppose, is why some term me danger-

ous, a menace to the hearthstone, to conjugal fidelity, and the like. But once within my power, all men come as my willing slaves to the Garden of Pleasure, whither you are going now—with me.”

There was both meaning and command in the Siren's declaration that Edgar was going somewhere with her, and the prospective victim viewed his situation with alarm. He thought of Jennie—she might unexpectedly return; and he stared at his temptress helplessly. For he knew well her power, though still possessed of some semblance of self-determination. He saw that his fair visitor was gazing intently at something on the bed beside him. It was the bottle, still half full. Silly! Why hadn't he resorted to that before—what he needed exactly, to brace him up!

He drained the bottle.

“Come!” the Siren commanded, simply.

Somewhat dizzy from the copious potion, Edgar managed nevertheless to dress quickly and was soon ready to go. The two then went out, the Siren leading.

They passed rapidly down the almost deserted street. A cop decorated a corner beneath a street lamp. It was dark, a fact Edgar could not understand, for he had not slept any, and had been in bed not more than

an hour or so. But few persons were seen, and they, too, seemed bent on hurried, suspicious errands. Edgar was glad that they met no one he knew, for it was awkward to accompany a woman so scantily clad. He could not know, of course, that his fair guide was invisible to all but himself. He had not noticed that she passed through doors before he had time to open them for her. A man with a clear brain would have seen several things that the somewhat confused Edgar did not see.

The town had no tenderloin, but it possessed some streets not often brushed by the skirts of the better-than-thou citizenry. The Siren was drifting along beside Edgar like a wraith or phantom, leading him by the silent compulsion of her will. Indeed, he was helpless, performing entirely at the supernatural behest of his strange guide, who led him now straight to the heart of the most disreputable part of the city. She stopped suddenly in front of a typical tenement building, long and two stories in height.

"In here!" she directed, in a tone of soft command.

Edgar approached the door and obeyed the Siren's order to knock. A burly negro responded. He opened the door a scant three

inches and appeared to be looking the newcomer over. Either the Siren was invisible to the black, or else he did not happen to see her. He gave all his attention to the visitor. Apparently satisfied, though having asked no questions, he widened the doorway enough to admit the caller, and Edgar entered.

The Siren and the big black led the way down the narrow corridor, Edgar submissively following. At just what point, Edgar did not notice, but the oppressive little hallway, very long and narrow, had suddenly widened, and the atmosphere smelled like out doors. And all at once the striking leafy designs on the realistic wall paper were shimmering in a delicious breeze, and the bewildered newcomer realized that he could peer through the foliage and catch suggestive vistas of greensward and distance. Not only was this enchanting, but the transformation was positively magical.

The strip of commonplace carpet under Edgar's feet had gradually roughened, and his grateful feet had sunk deeper and deeper as into some rich axminster or velours, until now he found he was treading the softest greensward imaginable. It was refreshing—he had walked so far, and felt indeed tired now and languid. The bas relief foliage on the walls was fluttering aspen-like and had taken more

definite shape in the form of shrubs and trees of strange appearance.

The Siren dropped back to walk by Edgar's side. They passed beneath a great sign, done in flowers, which read:

Garden of Pleasure.

Under the exquisite arch Edgar's fair guide stopped him for a moment to explain:

"This is the place where men sell their manhood for a taste of forbidden fruit. Wealth, thrones and immortality itself have been bartered for this. But what care you for the fate of others: you soon shall taste for yourself. Come! I bid you enter—for this is the Garden of Pleasure, wherein one may drown all sorrow—for a little moment—in the full cup of pleasure."

And she led the way, Edgar helplessly following.

They approached more closely to the center of the garden. It was very spacious, Edgar could see, and had magnificent reaches and vistas, down which were hints of fairy-like meadows, placid streams and alluring wooded spots. Everywhere abounded exotic trees suggestive of the tropics. Fruits grew profusely, while nymphs in diaphanous costumes tripped over the soft greensward or lolled in warm fountains and bathed in shallow pools.

Edgar's senses were enthralled, and he succumbed quickly to the enchantment of the spot. This was paradise indeed, the ultimate of all Heart's Desire.

But his guide pulled him along. They stopped next before a fountain the feature of which was the statue of a woman—the marble likeness of the Siren.

“The Goddess of Beauty,” whispered she in his ear.

Edgar turned to ask a question of his guide. She had vanished completely, and without a sign.

He returned his gaze to the figure in the fountain. It was smiling at him now—literally smiling; and its exquisitely-chiselled arms were extended in an invitation which the sunlit spray intervened but enhanced. The allure was overpowering. Edgar went nearer, and the statuesque beauty before him seemed to warm from its cold marble to living flesh. Her garments had seemed to somehow dissolve in the wet of the spray, until now she was quite nude—the loveliest thing mortal man had ever gazed upon.

Edgar had stepped close to the fountain, so close that the spray was drenching him. Little he cared, though. It seemed as if the embrace of the marvelous creature before him—whether

of stone or of flesh—would be the consummation of all earthly pleasures. He took yet one step closer.

Edgar once more lifted his gaze to the fair form before him—it was cold marble again, and draped even as the sculptor had chiselled it. Bewildered, he stretched his hands forth like one blinded—and touched the figure that was again by his side. The magic of the thing thrilled him, in spite of his confused senses.

“Never been here before, have you?”

The voice was coarse and jarring, though of feminine origin. It startled him, and he turned quickly and faced the form by his side. It was not, indeed, the amorous figure of the Siren (unless tragically, grotesquely transformed), but instead a hard-faced woman of the lowest type. In appearance she was the keeper of a nefarious dive, or of a house of ill repute.

“Never been here before, I take it,” she repeated.

“No, and I wouldn’t be here now if I wasn’t drunk!” Edgar protested. “I wouldn’t be here if——”

But the woman interrupted with a command: “Come here, girls—here’s a new one. Get busy and initiate him!”

At her summons, a half dozen girls came trooping boisterously up and immediately sur-

rounded their victim. Edgar was shocked at their appearance and their language, which would have shamed a pirate of the olden days into contempt for his profanity. And their eyes were baser than their tongues. Yet one among these seemed to Edgar shy and sad, and she held somewhat aloof from her companions. The matron of the garden noticed this.

“Don’t stand there looking like a little Sunday School idiot! Get busy and hand out the glasses.

“Never fear about the Sunday School stuff,” chided one of the crowd coarsely. “Bernice likes the live ones, all right. She’s only afraid some one else will land this one.”

Bernice’s unsullied beauty seemed to have aroused some jealousy already, mused Edgar, who could see at a glance that the girl was new to this sort of thing. He felt, in spite of his confusion, a little sorry for her. But his thoughts and considerations were needed closer home, due to the clamor of his bacchanalian tormentors who now pressed closer around him. Above the din sounded the lewd voice of the matron.

“Come, girls, get around me and drink to the health of the Goddess of Beauty and to our new victim.”

They closed in and filled their glasses from a bubbling red fountain at the base of the statue. Edgar was given a glassful and commanded to drink with them. The liquid was warm and delicious and set his blood on fire.

"What is it?" he ventured to ask.

"Wine of Desire, you innocent chump!" the matron answered in a hard voice.

She refilled his glass and handed it to him.

It was the rarest wine he had ever tasted. It was exquisitely intoxicating, but in a new and wonderful way. He wanted it, craved it. Yet he hesitated.

"Drink it!" the woman almost yelled.

Then followed a little ceremony that the hapless victim of the lewd enchanters was unprepared for. He was made to kneel at the foot of the statue while the scantily-clad females disposed themselves about him.

He was about to take the oath of allegiance to the Goddess of the Garden. The matron did the prompting, while the girls, kneeling, filled in with an obligato of sound that might have been called a chant for want of a better term. It was pleasing withal, though to Edgar the whole thing seemed so terribly absurd. The matron impatiently led on:

"Do you promise to serve the Goddess of Beauty at all times?"

The novitiate hesitated, not knowing just what was expected of him.

"Promise!" whispered the dulcet voice of the invisible Siren in his ear.

"I promise," said Edgar, without enthusiasm.

"Are you willing to leave everything you have to obey her call?"

"What must I leave?" Edgar asked.

"Your home, your ambitions, your business if need be; and especially your silly notions of morality. Promise!"

"But I am a married man!" the candidate protested.

"Married nothing!" sneered the matron, who was becoming impatient. "Why, we like them best, the dear old veterans! We would have to close the garden if it weren't for them!"

"What! Be false to Jennie—break my marriage vows!" he groaned. He had closed his eyes, as if to shut out the realities of his surroundings. And there sprang before him a vision of a solemn scene out of the sacred past. He and Jennie were again at the marriage altar, vowing to each other and to God that they would be faithful 'till death did them part.

But the sweet retrospect was rudely broken by the flinty words of the matron. "Yes,

you pious mutt—break everything that ties you to *one* woman!”

The victim groaned aloud. The unwilling and reluctant answer stuck in his throat; and even the persuasive coercion of the hovering Siren was all but unavailing in bringing the promise forth. But the unfortunate Edgar finally emitted a sound that the matter-of-fact mistress of ceremonies was willing to interpret as an affirmative, and she indicated that the affair should proceed.

“He’ll do,” decided the matron. “Bring the bandage, Kitty, and give him blind man’s choice,” she ordered, in brisk, business-like tones. Then to Edgar:

“Get up from your knees and I’ll blindfold you. There! Now catch your mate, and she’ll put you through the last degree. That will make you a life member here, and we can depend on seeing you often. There’s no profit in these first nights for us, you know. But we can always depend on the come-backs.”

There was nothing for Edgar to do but to play the game as ordered. He resistlessly allowed himself to be blindfolded by the officious matron with material torn uncere- moniously from the costume of one of the girls, which depredation left the damsel in a state bordering pretty nearly on *au naturel*.

This produced a hearty and vulgar laugh from the assembled "nymphs," who by courtesy of environment rather than deportment might be called such.

Then there ensued what seemed to Edgar a most ludicrous performance, in which he played the leading rôle. The game was a most voluptuous form of blind man's buff, in which it was up to Edgar to capture one of the flitting damsels. He certainly made a fool of himself. He collided with trees; he fell sprawling into brooks; he wound his arms about statues, and on several occasions he made captive some innocent visitor to the Garden, who like himself had found entrance through the agency of booze.

Had he but known it—in fact, he should have known it—there was another section of the Garden unfamiliar to first-timers, where Pleasure moved in franker guise, where plain debauchery had supplanted fascination, and wanton lust ate without table cloths or napkins. Edgar would come to that a little later. But guile and seduction were necessary forerunners of direct bestial gratification of the grosser senses, and the management of the place understood the business thoroughly. Human nature is understood better in the tenderloin than in other places.

Edgar's first concept of the Garden, as suggested by tantalizing but imperfect vistas through shimmering trees, had been that of an elysian paradise, devoid of care and worry, where one's soul might find pervading peace forever. So the vulgarity of the "girls" who had flocked around him at the behest of a wanton creature bred in the "cribs," had been a distinct shock to him—because these same girls, seen in the distance, had presented sylph-like forms and graces of ethereal beauty—or so it had seemed to the bewildered visitant on first entering. The dissolution of the living statue's garments—she of the central fountain—had not disgusted him, as such an exhibition would have done in everyday life, for the exquisite revelation of beauty was almost a holy thing—he had wondered at the handiwork of a Creator who could design it.

The raucous voice of the insistent matron prodded Edgar when he lagged at the sport, and she waddled along at his side and egged him on as long as her breath lasted. Then the invisible but helpfully-inclined Siren took up the good work, and poured encouraging words into Edgar's ear. He was so nearly worn out by now that he was ready to accept his next capture, whether it proved to be a tree, a hussy or the disgusting matron herself.

The overtaxed mistress of the Garden, sensing the situation as it stood with their unwilling victim, deliberately thrust happiness in his way in the person of the girl Bernice. She grabbed the maiden roughly and literally threw her into the oncoming candidate's arms. The bandage was removed from Edgar's eyes—and he saw who it was he held in listless grasp.

"There now! What did I tell you? She wanted to be caught." The snippy one with the despoiled garment had spoken. Edgar looked at her. Her heavy lips dropped sensuously. She made no effort to conceal her breasts, which during the exertion of the gambol had become bared. The remainder of her costume did not meet the demands of ordinary decency. The consciousness of this she flung in his face, brazenly knowing that it offended him.

"You wanted to be caught, didn't you!" the half-clad one sneered at the shrinking Bernice again, limp in Edgar's arms.

"I didn't!" indignantly protested she.

"Come, don't stand there!" ordered the matron. "Get busy with him."

The withering command of the mistress of ceremonies was intended as much for the indifferent Edgar as it was for the reluctant Bernice; and he felt the futility of resistance in the face of such tremendous odds as were

arrayed against him. Besides, he was in a sense conscious of the moral collapse that had followed his initiation into the adulation of the Goddess. He was quite aware of the course he was taking, yet now without desire to desist.

Without voicing the protest that she seemed to feel, Bernice led her consort down one of the paths that wound among shrubs and flowers. They met other couples, like themselves on pleasure bent. These sought shady retreats and quiet nooks, from the crowd apart.

"What is this?" abruptly asked Edgar.

The two were skirting the boundary of the Garden now, and had followed along a hedge that formed a wall breast high. On the other side of the hedge Edgar had beheld something that arrested him.

Bernice looked in the direction indicated. "That?—that thing?" replied she. "Why that is one of the outcasts from the Garden. He refused obeisance to the Goddess of Beauty, and she exiled him. He is the Bilious Saint—hungry, but too good to eat the food set before him. Now he starves on the fruit of a withered tree."

Edgar surveyed the creature. He was lean and hungry looking. He poked with bony fingers among the dead leaves on the ground, finding now and then a husk that he chewed

on ravenously. The withered husks were wind-falls from a barren tree beneath which the bilious one sat in a posture of such dejection that Edgar was heartily sorry for him. Edgar looked at Bernice questioningly.

“A warning against celibacy,” murmured she; and they moved on.

Cries, and the loud tones of a man in anger, startled the seductress and her companion, who halted and listened to the commotion, coming from another part of the Garden.

“Someone is in distress,” exclaimed Edgar—“a girl; and they may be hurting her. Come on!”

Bernice was alarmed at her companion's intention to interfere, knowing full well the wrath of the matron, and fearing it.

“Don't!” she pleaded, clutching his arm. “Those things happen every night. It's a part of the life here. Somebody has to pay, that's all; and probably she is paying now—God pity her!”

The last was said under her breath and with a shudder.

Edgar, however, broke away and ran toward the commotion. Bernice followed him, striving to retain her clutch on his arm. That would be her alibi should the matron see.

Hurdling a low hedge, which landed him in a neatly-contrived retreat, Edgar found himself suddenly viewing a dramatic scene. A man whom he recognized as one of the leading figures in the community was standing menacingly above a couple who cowered on the grass at his feet. The girl was his own daughter. *She* had come by the jazz route into the Garden, down the path that started in after-theatre suppers sans chaperon; in apartment dances so select that the doors were bolted lest old-fogy fathers and mothers walk in unheralded. She supposed, of course, (when conscience hinted of danger) that there would be plenty of by-paths that would turn back up to the level of thorough respectability, should she care to retrace her steps. She knew of the Garden, of course, everyone knew. She never had really been there—just peeked in once or twice, and it didn't look half so terrible as it had been pictured.

The man in the case was her own father's business associate. That was unfortunate, of course. Yet he was not wholly to blame. The girl had found it best to frequent certain places under a fictitious name—they all did that, because once or twice the places had been raided. These were "studios" where performances were given in the name of art for art's sake

alone. Few were admitted, and the coterie was very "select." There were exhibitions, dansant and pantomime, that only the true artist could appreciate. The vulgar world could not be admitted.

The tired business man, infatuated with the girl who was seeking life's thrills in whatever direction they might be found, so long as they bore the label of respectability, could offer but one thrill more, and that was the Garden itself, the path to which he pictured as being perfectly safe. He was especially convincing when he reminded her of something that she already knew—that they were about the only ones in their set who had never been there. He was solid and substantial, and absolutely respectable, and thoroughly versed in the ways of the world. He ought to know, if anybody should. Besides—she had heard a good deal: a good deal that she would like to investigate. The shocking things she was sure she could disprove, and would like the chance to do so. The inherent instinct that first told her of the existence of the Garden, wakened also the curiosity to visit it.

And she and the tired business man did so.

"What are you doing here!" The thundering tones of the irate father were terrifying in the wrath that they showed. The right of

a parent to demand explanation from a wayward child swayed the man.

His challenge, amounting almost to an imprecation, so uncompromising was his tone, had an unexpected effect.

The recalcitrant girl rose dramatically to her feet; then faced her father squarely.

Edgar thought the man was about to strike his own daughter, for he was in an appalling rage, and towered above her menacingly.

“What are *you* doing here, in the Garden?”

The father wilted, like one struck down suddenly in a gas attack.

The other man got to his feet awkwardly, and disappeared.

“Come!” said the father, softly; and he led her away.

Edgar and Bernice resumed their stroll, she fearful (because of the matron) that the incident just witnessed might dampen her conquest. She knew what was expected of her—to make her victim want to come again. But she need not have feared. As of the ancient Grove of Daphne, he who once entered never wished to leave.

Bernice made directly now for her private bower, leaf-walled and secluded. It was a most enchanting spot—a paradise within Paradise. The leafy incense of aromatic shrubs pervaded

the retreat and lulled the senses into a dreamy repose. Edgar gave himself over to the spell of the time and place, and sank down gratefully upon a grassy mound, in the center of which grew a tree most rare, whose fruit was tempting beyond anything he had ever looked upon before. Appetite for the strange fruit filled him instantly.

He called aloud to the girl, Bernice, who was not far off. She was shy again, and appeared unwilling to enact her expected part in what to her was to be a tragedy—to Edgar drama sublime.

“The fruit!” exclaimed Edgar. “I desire this fruit, yet see—I cannot reach it. You must help me—you alone can give it to me. Come. I want you—you!”

The girl obeyed, tremblingly, for she heard just then a coarse female voice rasping through the Garden, in tones of rude command to someone.

“What was that?” asked Edgar, frowning.

“The voice of Necessity, bidding unwilling ones perform the acts their hearts revolt at.”

“Your speech perplexes me; but come! this is the hour of pleasure. I would eat this fruit. Pluck it for me, and tell me its name. What call they this?”

“Passion Fruit, to those who eat understandingly. But to most, these become the Apples of Sodom.”

“And will you spare me one?”

She looked in the direction whence had come the strident voice of the Matron of the Garden.

“I must!” she answered with a shiver.

The unhappy girl crept nearer. She had gotten the thing that in his own strength the Man was unable to procure for himself, and was bringing it to him, tucked away in her breast—a fruit fair to look upon, spotless and untouched.

He had no regard for the fact that this was the woman’s possession, entrusted to her keeping, *Hers*, to offer or to withhold, as *she might choose*. In any other setting, her tree would have been a precious, even holy possession. But here—the fruit was inedible and even loathsome in her eyes, the more because those who came partook unworthily. Hunger in her had turned to repugnance.

Edgar ruthlessly tore the fruit from her breast, before even she could pretend to offer it to him. Once he had the tantalizing fruit in his grasp, he forgot everything in the world beside—home, wife, child and marriage vows. He ate deeply and to his fill. The instincts of

the brute in man ran true to form; his one idea was satiety.

Some time later Edgar roused to his senses. The girl, Bernice, had gone. Through the Elysian shade filtered the harsh voice of the Matron of the Garden, goading the "girls" on to their duty. Another victim was being "taken down the line," and Edgar, shivering a little with the cool of approaching evening, wondered if the latest novitiate had a wife and wee child—a *girl child*—at home, waiting for his returning.

He got to his feet, and staggered out of the chilly bower, whose fragrant incense seemed to have given way to dank odors of decaying mold. He glanced up at the heavily laden tree. Its malodorous fruit, over-ripe and bloated, appeared more like putrid windfalls, rotting in the grass, than anything tempting to the appetite. Appetite indeed! He was now nauseated—anything but hungry.

With a complete revulsion of feeling as compared with his entrance into this spot an hour ago, he hurried away from it now with all the energy prompted by returning soberness of thought. He was actuated by the one desire to get away, to be gone from the scene of his debauch. Had this lapse of rigid principle been disassociated from the ensnarement of booze,

he would not have reproached himself so much; but the thought rankled that it was a plain case of whisky getting him into trouble again. And this time, trouble of a deeper sort than ever before. For tonight he had broken his marriage vows. Jennie had always trusted him in that, he knew. There had been one thing he had held inviolate. But now!

He rushed toward what he thought must be the limits of the Garden, for he had perceived a very high hedge. Gaining it, he found an opening. This was plainly marked with the laconic letters, EXIT.

The exit proved to have the dignity of a portal; yes, and a guard stood by, watching all who passed out. This was a female figure, fair of form and very beautiful, but arrayed in the unmistakable garb of Death.

"Very singular," Edgar mused. "What place has Death in the Garden of Pleasure?" Then an unusual thought struck him, and he turned very pale.

He quickened his pace, and rapidly passed through the exit, giving the Guardian of the Portal an apprehensive glance as he almost touched her robes in going out.

She smiled at him, her beautiful face sardonic in its mockery.

It was the Siren, in the Reaper's attire!

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